

Minutes of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission meeting, October 20, 2025

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM, and the Sunshine Law Notice read. The roll was called. Present were: W. Andrews, T. Chase (7:05), S. Jaracz, E. Pires, M. Santiago, A. Schmidt, R. Suydam, E. Vastola; and sustainability coordinator T. Kenyon, J. Walker (volunteer). Absent: P. Walitsky. In his absence, vice chair R. Suydam presided. Also absent: Council liaison E. Potosnak.

The meeting was addressed by Mike Sidlowski (assisted by Dierek Chapman) of Live Oak Landscaping, on sustainable landscaping in response to climate change. The most important approach is use of climate-resilient plants. Resilience is defined as ability to endure, recovery capacity, and adaptation to survive periods of extreme heat and drought. Some resilient tree species are American Hornbeam, Black Gum, Red Maple, Swamp White Oak, ... [there were more, these are what I got down]. Our forests are changing as species such as common dogwood and white birch 'migrate' northward (die out at this latitude, while expanding their range northward, in response to increasing temperatures). Pear trees are resilient, but invasive. They survey what trees a property has, in order to increase biodiversity by new plantings.

Grass: don't cut it too short, blades are needed for photosynthesis. Cutting more than 1/3 of blades removes more than one half of photosynthetic capability. Taller grass (4") inhibits crab-grass; this is the level they recommend. In fall and winter one can cut shorter. Fine fescue does not like current New Jersey temperatures, tends to lie flat.

"Mulch volcanoes" (excessive mulch around the base of trees) lead to roots growing in the mulch which wrap around the base of the tree and shut off transport from deeper roots.

This concluded their presentation, and the meeting resumed the regular agenda. The minutes of October 6 were approved. The meeting was opened to the public. There were no comments from the public, and the meeting was closed to the public.

Correspondence: J. Lynn Maloney of Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership sent a list of their upcoming events. An e-mail from Lisa Kapsokephalos asked us to order her neighbor not to cut any vegetation (a power the EC does not have).

Site plans: Thirukaman Velavuchan, 21 Highland Ave., asking for relief from some conditions of a previous Zoning Board approval. The building in fact does not exceed the allowed height, but various aspects of the construction exceed what was approved, particularly impervious coverage (due to a wide driveway).

New business: pursuing our partnership with the Astronomy Club on dark skies, T. Kenyon met with them. Ron Urisote, co-president, is New Jersey Ambassador for Dark Skies. He wants to make a presentation to us. We should invite someone from the police dept. and the township manager.

The state of New Jersey sent a message offering 'one stop shopping' for funding for energy efficiency projects. We submit criteria for a project, they suggest the best sources for funding. We should publicize this, especially to houses of worship (send a mailing).

Committees: Education and Outreach is working on a presentation on composting, perhaps to be at the Community Center to accommodate a larger audience. Somerset County has in the past donated composters; should we contact them to see if we can get one?

R. Suydam described her work with insurance companies about the NJPACT REAL rules, correcting misconceptions put out by developers who oppose the regulations. She is building

connections between the insurance industry and the environmental community (ANJEC, NJLCV, Watershed Institute, etc.)

T. Kenyon reported on the annual ANJEC Environmental Congress.

R. Suydam reported on meeting with the Chamber of Commerce concerning Skip the Stuff. One important member of the Chamber commented “we cannot endorse anything environmental – it’s too political”. She has made contact with one member who owns a restaurant and is interested. We need more contacts with owners (as distinguished from on-site personnel).

Youth member: Council is working on a policy on youth members for all committees/ and commissions.

The meeting was opened to the public. There were no comments, and the meeting was closed, and adjourned at 8:40 PM.